

GLOBAL

INITIATIVE

FOR

ECONOMIC

2026 Strategic Plan

2030

SOCIAL

AND

CULTURAL

RIGHTS

A strategy for calibrated and assertive action.

Introduction

The world in 2025 is facing increasingly complex global, regional, and national contexts.

We are witnessing a geopolitical reconfiguration and, in unprecedented ways, a deepening crisis of multilateralism. This crisis is both political and financial, as States increasingly withdraw support from the international institutions and frameworks designed to maintain global stability since the end of World War II. Authoritarianism is resurging across multiple regions, while democracies face a growing legitimacy crisis and a series of significant setbacks.

Inequality is increasing at an accelerated pace, especially at the top of the pyramid. Even during the last pandemic, which caused an unprecedented global economic contraction and human suffering, billionaire wealth surged. A very small minority of corporations increasingly shape the delivery of basic services; global tax rules and global finance; fossil fuel production and consumption; the production of renewable energy; and even the rules of multilateralism and global governance according to their private interests, driving, in most cases, anti-democratic outcomes at the expense of the global majorities and the public good.

Meanwhile, billions of people struggle to access basic rights, including healthcare, education, social protection, energy, water, adequate housing, and decent work. The climate and environmental emergencies remain far from being addressed effectively; instead, extractivism, overconsumption, and war continue to dominate the global agenda.

The human rights movement faces an additional set of challenges. Its connection and responsiveness to social movements and lived realities have not been as strong as they could be, and many of its tactics no longer fit today's political and communication landscape. Traditional funding sources have declined sharply, as donors move away from the movement's language, tools, and established approaches. Yet, this shift has not been met with the emergence of stronger alternatives capable of driving systemic and lasting change, or of effectively resisting the growing threats to multilateralism and democracy.

Amid this turbulence, the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR) is at a defining crossroads. Building on a decade and a half of experience pushing for better standards and the realisation of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, GI-ESCR's new strategy responds to calls for greater clarity, strategic focus, and concrete, measurable change on the ground. It also calls for boldness, in terms of building communications and narrative strategies fit for our times

and abandoning formats and language that have not shown the expected result. The next five years should see GI-ESCR sharpen its identity as an agile, coalition-building organisation focused on achieving concrete impact and narrative change.

Our main areas of work –defending public services and care, promoting climate and economic justice and enhancing gender equality– are interconnected and remain highly relevant for addressing today's most important obstacles to the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights. They are also key to challenging existing power structures.

The new strategy will recognise that GI-ESCR's leadership and staff are from the Global South, embracing their perspectives as a central guiding framework. It will also place a clearer emphasis on developing countries where we have a consistent presence. This narrower focus will strengthen our ability to bridge the realities of grassroots movements with the evolving agendas in global and multilateral debates.

The lessons learnt in recent years are clear:

- A bold human rights-based vision must match achievable priorities and accountability for tangible results.
- In the face of the structural changes in multilateralism, there is a need to be more selective and strategic in our interactions within international spaces and dispute the reforms from a rights-based perspective.
- Communications and narrative change are not secondary but central to shifting policy, setting agendas, and shaping public understanding.
- GI-ESCR's unique strength lies in its flexibility, which brings together diverse stakeholders, translates between expert and movement spaces, and supports policy advocacy and narrative change.
- Real impact requires focus: sustaining and deepening engagement in key programme areas (public services and care, economic justice, and climate action) and prioritising relationships in regions and countries where GI-ESCR's legitimacy is strongest.
- Rights-based systemic change must focus on feminist and intersectional principles, and the agency of those historically excluded from decision-making.
- GI-ESCR firmly believes it has a vital role to play in the years ahead. This strategy is both a guiding framework and a living document, designed to support proactive adaptation, collective learning, and a principled focus in a time of global transformation.

Vision, Mission and Theory of Change

Vision

International and domestic public institutions, resources, and systems are democratically organised to serve collective wellbeing and dignified lives, ensure environmental sustainability, and uphold gender and social equality as a foundation for true prosperity and peace.

Mission

To transform power structures and public narratives so that every person and community can access, claim, and enjoy their economic, social, and cultural rights, now and in the future.

Theory of Change

Our theory of change starts with active listening to identify concerns, needs, and patterns of inequality, exclusion, or barriers to rights and resources. We act when these issues align with our mandate, have broad relevance, and where GI-ESCR can add distinctive value. We then shape the ecosystem that drives decision-making through three interconnected strategies: (1) **actors**, by building alliances that break silos, bridge differences, and create momentum among varied stakeholders; (2) **institutions**, by pursuing targeted advocacy to build the support needed for policy change; and (3) **narratives**, by assembling and analysing evidence, amplifying diverse voices, and disseminating compelling arguments through innovative communications that also engage emotions. Together, these strategies help catalyse systemic and sustainable transformation;

Our Strategic Approach

Communications and Narrative Change

Communications will be prioritised as a core component to achieve impact. Communications are a means of shaping shared understanding. Storytelling sits at the heart of this effort: it translates complex policy debates into human experience, connects agendas across programmes, and sustains the sense of purpose that binds movements together. By turning evidence and lived realities into stories that resonate, GI-ESCR can strengthen public imagination and political will for systemic change. By anchoring messaging in rigorous evidence, lived experience, and deep coalition-building, GI-ESCR will position itself at the forefront of reframing public services, care, economic justice, and climate action within professional and policy arenas.

Gender and Intersectionality

GI-ESCR makes a strategic commitment to embed gender justice and intersectionality into every aspect of its work, not as an afterthought or cross-cutting theme, but as a primary lens for research, policy, advocacy, partnerships, and organisational culture. This commitment involves moving beyond “mainstreaming” to real action, accountability, and developing models that inspire broader systemic change.

- GI-ESCR’s work is grounded in a feminist understanding of power. It spotlights the ways that gender, race, class, ability, and other systems of oppression shape both lived experience and policy outcomes.
- Recognising unpaid care work and the work of sustaining society and community as central to economic and social rights.

Multilateralism and National Engagement

GI-ESCR is shifting to targeted action at the multilateral level, focusing on spaces with potential for fundamental structural change, while simultaneously deepening our presence and advocacy at the national level in a selected set of priority countries. This dual approach is rooted in our commitment to achieve real impact and in a deliberate orientation towards the Global South.

- **Shaping Reforms:** GI-ESCR will actively participate in and seek to influence emerging discussions on reforming multilateral systems.

- **Strategic Forum Selection:** Instead of dispersing resources across all international venues, GI-ESCR will focus on selected spaces with real potential for influence in our priority agendas where rulemaking and standards-setting are evolving.
- **Southern-Rooted Advocacy:** GI-ESCR's credibility derives from prioritising the elevation of Global South perspectives, highlighting lived experiences, and linking national and local lessons to global policy.
- **Focus and Flexibility:** GI-ESCR will concentrate its resources in core countries and regions where historic presence, partnerships, and legitimacy are strongest (notably in Latin America and Africa), with selective, capacity-driven expansion in other emerging contexts.
- **Leveraging National Partners:** GI-ESCR's grassroots and national impact depends on trusted relationships with local organisations in priority countries. We will work closely with them to amplify visibility and credibility, add complementary expertise, and drive tangible local outcomes in our priority areas.
- **Bridge National Struggles and International Spaces:** GI-ESCR prioritises bringing grassroots voices and lived experiences to the attention of policymakers in multilateral forums, while translating global frameworks and commitments into policy arguments and practical change at the national level in partnership with local actors.

Programme

GI-ESCR's new strategy will, for the next five years, concentrate on three mutually reinforcing pillars, prioritising systemic relevance, impact on lived realities, and measurable progress:

- Public Services for Care Societies
 - Economic Justice and Climate Finance
 - Climate and Environmental Justice
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Public Services for Care Societies

The principle of universal, quality, rights-based public services is at the heart of GI-ESCR's strategic identity and impact. Public services—education, health, care, social protection, water and sanitation, energy—are key to realising economic, social and cultural rights, strengthening democracy, fostering gender justice, and building societal resilience.

Care, both paid and unpaid, is inseparable from this agenda: it sustains life, enables social and economic participation, and must be recognised, valued, and rebalanced in any rights-based future. Public services enable part of the redistribution of care, providing professional support to those who need it and reducing the disproportionate impact on women, mainly from disadvantaged sectors.

Across all regions, these foundational systems are threatened by fiscal austerity while new and increasingly sophisticated forms of commercialisation are taking shape, as a growing consensus supports privately owned, for-profit initiatives in areas such as education and healthcare. The rapid evolution of these private and public-private arrangements has outpaced our understanding of their broader implications. There is limited knowledge about the quality of services they deliver, their alignment with the public interest—particularly regarding universality, access, and non-discrimination—and their potential to generate new forms of inequality and/or rights violations.

Our goals: We will develop and champion practical, rights-based models of universal, high-quality public services, and make the case for financing them through progressive fiscal reform. We will scrutinise privatisation and commercialisation through joint research and advocacy, while advancing care as a public good and a human

right—grounded in a fairer redistribution of unpaid care work between genders and across households, the state, and communities.

What we intend to achieve:

1. Local groups in priority Africa-LAC countries are better equipped to track what's happening in public services, push for improvements, and hold governments to account—and public authorities are more likely to respond to community demands.
2. Real-world pilots in priority countries across Africa or Latin America show what rights-based public services can look like in practice: free, accessible, well-funded, high-quality, and designed with communities, with an intersectional lens and strong communications to spread the lessons.
3. National campaigns in priority countries successfully connect the dots between progressive tax reform and the funding of health, education, or social protection, bringing different movements together and shifting public narratives toward “fair taxes fund quality services.”
4. International research and advocacy help shine a light on privatisation and “innovative finance” in public services—and strengthen collective efforts to defend public education and healthcare.
5. Stronger alliances across human rights, gender, education, health, and finance groups help break silos, link national, regional, and global debates, and build shared momentum for universal public services and a fairer distribution of care.

Economic Justice and Climate Finance

GI-ESCR seeks to reshape economic and fiscal systems to become active tools for justice, well-being, and planetary sustainability. The economic justice programme understands that human rights cannot be realised without fundamentally questioning the ways in which wealth is generated, distributed, and governed, with the goal of reducing poverty, material deprivation, and other violations of economic, social and cultural rights hindering livelihoods.

Concretely, we will promote tax justice through progressive reforms, global norm-setting, and engagement in public debates, promoting narratives that link taxation to equity, redistribution and the sustainable financing of the public services necessary

for the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights. Connecting climate and economic justice, we will champion public resource mobilisation towards the financing of a just transition that prioritises the Global South and integrates, fiscal justice, public services and care as well as the need to phase out fossil fuels.

Our goals: We will help shape emerging global tax governance—especially the UN Tax Convention—so it embeds human rights standards and real accountability, while working with national partners to advance concrete, context-specific, redistributive tax proposals at the local level. We will also connect fiscal policy to climate and economic justice through targeted engagement in climate finance and transition spaces, centre intersectional impacts on women and marginalised groups, and shift public narratives toward seeing fair taxation and redistribution as essential to rights-based, workable solutions.

What we intend to achieve:

1. Human rights standards shape the UN Tax Convention and its follow-up governance, strengthening fairer, more democratic global tax rules.
2. Tax and climate finance debates are better aligned, with new fiscal space recognised as a key source to fund climate and biodiversity commitments.
3. Two to four progressive, rights-based tax initiatives are advanced at national level in priority countries (Nigeria, Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia or Argentina).
4. Clearer, more accessible narratives build broader public understanding and support for progressive taxation, redistribution, and well-funded public services.

Climate and Environmental Justice

To avoid the worst effects of the climate emergency, deep, rapid and sustained emission cuts are needed to reach global net-zero CO₂ around mid-century, together with sharp reductions in other greenhouse gases. However, without a rights-based approach, the energy transition risks perpetuating human rights violations and the same patterns of exclusion existing under the fossil fuel system specially as transition policies have often prioritised technical and economic considerations over the rights and lived experiences of affected communities, particularly those in the Global South who bear the brunt of both climate impacts and extractive transition policies despite having contributed the least to the climate emergency.

As a result, such policies –that have failed to distribute the costs and benefits of the transition equitably, allowing certain countries and small global elites to benefit disproportionately and leaving behind populations already facing marginalisation and systemic discrimination– are often resisted by developing countries and still perceived as a Global North agenda.

As energy is at the heart of most human activities, it is fundamental to tackle the systemic failures of energy systems and power new economies and societies where people and planet can flourish. Access to sustainable energy must be regarded as a fundamental right and a matter of social justice, with all aspects of energy policy and action assessed through the lenses of equity, non-discrimination, and planetary well-being.

Our goals: GI-ESCR will advance legal and policy standards that recognise energy as both a fundamental human right and a common public good, while shifting climate and energy narratives toward justice through evidence and stories grounded in lived experience. Building on the Feminist Plan for a Just Energy Transition, we will embed gender equality and intersectionality in transition policy by developing advocacy tools and policy briefings and strengthening collaborations with women-led organisations, coalitions, and movements—especially in the Global South.

What we intend to achieve:

1. National and international coalitions increasingly adopt and advocate for gender-just, human-rights-based energy transition pathways, particularly across the Global South.
2. Gender-just and human-rights-based principles gain sustained traction in multilateral forums—especially the UNFCCC—shaping negotiation language, policy framing, and decisions.
3. At least two gender-just, rights-based energy transition or sustainable energy policies are promoted, adopted, implemented, or scaled in targeted countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Colombia, South Africa, or Kenya).
4. Momentum grows toward formal recognition and substantive integration of the right to sustainable energy within national, regional, and global legal and policy frameworks.
5. Global South, rights-based narratives that centre care, justice, and agency are strengthened and increasingly influence how energy transitions are understood and debated.

Organisational Sustainability and Resilience

GI-ESCR will strengthen its internal foundations to remain resilient, principled, and effective in unpredictable contexts, with staff wellbeing and a culture of excellence at the core. We will reinforce financial sustainability by diversifying funding streams and allocating resources strategically to core priorities where we can add the greatest value. We will also sharpen risk management and crisis-response protocols and consolidate key geographic and thematic engagements to manage volatility, protect continuity, and avoid overreach. GI is committed to building a culture of learning and reflection that guides its work.

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